

Department of Planning & Environmental Management,
School of Environment, Education and Development.



Trafford Housing Trust

ESRC NORTH WEST DOCTORAL TRAINING CENTRE CASE PHD STUDENTSHIP

Assessing the role of housing association regeneration activity in tackling health inequalities in Greater Manchester

Background

The research will explore the different ways in which a range of social housing providers in Greater Manchester have attempted to address health inequalities as part of their wider housing and regeneration strategies. The project responds to three sets of research and policy concern.

The first centres on central government's programme of austerity and its repercussions for housing associations and their involvement in urban regeneration. The withdrawal of targeted regeneration funding by central government following the 2010 general election was premised on the expectation that private and voluntary sector bodies would begin to inherit from the state responsibility for delivering urban policies (see, for example, Deas and Doyle, 2013). Housing associations were to play a key part in that process, fulfilling an expanded role in delivering regeneration and providing a wider mix of services in addition to social housing. At the same time, housing associations have also faced many of the same financial pressures that have affected the public sector, with direct funding reduced, reliance on rental income increased, and private borrowing for development ever more important.

The result is that housing associations face significant financial challenges in meeting an expanded remit. This is important in respect of a second stimulus for the research, which centres on the contribution that housing associations can make towards remedying health inequalities, both spatial and social. There is longstanding research interest in the mutually reinforcing relationship between poverty and ill-health, and in the contribution of poor quality housing to raised levels of morbidity and mortality. The widened remit of social landlords such as the co-sponsor of the studentship, Trafford Housing Trust, means there is increased scope to contribute towards multi-agency efforts to tackle ill-health. A consequence is that housing associations face pressure to develop better evidence about the health characteristics of their tenants and to understand more fully the dynamics of socio-spatial inequalities across the areas in which they provide accommodation. A more robust evidence base could in turn inform practical efforts by housing associations to target certain neighbourhoods or households, or prioritise particular types of intervention.

The third driver for the proposed research relates to ongoing reform of local governance and the selective process of functional and fiscal devolution to new combined authorities in emerging city-regions. Greater Manchester has been at the forefront of this, with 'DevoManc' continuing an incremental process of developing institutional and policy capacity at the city-region scale that has extended over much of the last 25 years (Deas, 2014). A major part of governance reforms announced in 2014 was the devolution of some responsibility for health services to the Greater Manchester city-region. This is important in relation to the proposed research because of the potential for housing associations to coordinate the delivery of services alongside the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. Yet evidence suggests that previous efforts to integrate targeted housing regeneration and mainstream health budgets have proved ineffective (Lawless and Beatty, 2013). The proposed research would therefore explore the extent to which housing associations, alongside commissioning bodies, have been able to provide community-focused services as part of their wider housing and regeneration activities.

Research aim and objectives

Drawing on the stimuli outlined above, the research aims to advance understanding of the role played by housing associations (and their potential future role) in delivering health services in the context of local

institutional and policy reforms linked to the advent of combined authorities. To meet this aim, the research project has three objectives:

- a) To assess the extent to which, and the ways in which, housing associations are developing evidence bases to inform interventions that address health inequalities, and to consider how they could be refined and extended.
- b) To explore the nature and form of existing housing association activity in respect of health inequalities and the degree to which health priorities feature in their housing and regeneration plans.
- c) To assess the existing relationship between housing associations and health service commissioning bodies and consider the implications of the ongoing process of devolution to combined authorities.

Work programme and methodology

The research will involve a six stage sequential programme of work.

Stage 1: *Scoping exercise, literature review and methodology* [months 1-11]. The first stage will comprise a review of the research literature, structured around each of the three stimuli for the research outlined above: the advent of austerity politics and the consequences of financial retrenchment and policy reform for housing associations; the relationship between housing and ill-health and existing research evidence on efforts by social housing providers to deliver health services; and the nature of unfolding local governance reforms and their implications for the provision of health services. Based on review of existing literature, the doctoral student will (where necessary) refine the aim and objectives when finalising the methodology for the research project.

Stage 2: *Case study documentary review* [months 12-14]. Empirical data, both primary and secondary, will be assembled via a case study of Greater Manchester, an area viewed as an innovator in relation to city-regional governance and which has generated sustained academic interest. Stage 2 will involve the student collecting and reviewing existing secondary information on the form and extent of involvement in delivering health-related services amongst Greater Manchester housing associations. This will draw upon grey literature and internal housing association documents. Access to the latter will be facilitated via Jennifer Doyle's membership of the Athena group of housing associations in Greater Manchester and through the National Housing Federation North West Social Impact Group (of which she is chair).

Stage 3: *Secondary data on health inequalities in Greater Manchester* [months 15-18]. The student will collect a range of secondary small-area data for Greater Manchester, allowing inter-neighbourhood comparison across the entire conurbation and including the areas in which housing associations are active. Data will comprise a mix of measures of morbidity and mortality, calibrated against corresponding data at lower super output area from the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation. Here, the student will draw upon the applicants' experience of research on measuring patterns of neighbourhood deprivation, and their recent work as part of the Just GM project (<http://www.jgm.manchester.ac.uk/>), part of which looked at the relationship between deprivation and health. The data will provide a descriptive backdrop of the patterning of deprivation and health inequalities to help sensitise the subsequent assembly and analysis of primary qualitative data as part of the case study.

Stage 4: *Elite semi-structured interviews* [months 19-24]. Primary data will be assembled through interviews (n≅25) with, for example, housing providers, representatives of the combined authority and other local authorities, and from the clinical commissioning groups within Greater Manchester. Discussion will focus on how far health concerns are (or could be) linked to housing association activity. The interviews will attempt to identify existing areas of successful (and unsuccessful) practice in relation to the integration of health and housing interventions. Drawing on stage 3, interviews will also explore the ways in which housing providers might in due course develop more robust frameworks for monitoring health circumstances in their areas (e.g. what indicators should be used, from where should data be sourced, how might data inform housing associations in providing health services?).

Stage 5: *Nested case study* [months 25-27]. The student will explore the experience of an existing attempt by the CASE partner to support health services as part of its core business. A possible candidate is its Shrewsbury Street development, a regeneration project in a deprived neighbourhood with healthcare provision at its heart. Drawing on documentary evidence and a short programme of interviews (n≅10) with housing association staff and health professionals linked to the project, the student will canvass views on whether this kind of development constitutes a workable template for future regeneration.

Stage 6: *Summative focus group discussion, user engagement and final writing-up* [months 28-36]. The final stage, conducted in parallel with writing-up, will involve a focus group, bringing together local and national policy practitioner and multi-disciplinary academic participants. Discussion will be structured around a written summary and accompanying presentation of the findings from earlier phases of the research. The focus group will be held in Manchester (hosted by Trafford Housing Trust) in approximately month 28, and comprise around 10 invited participants. Dissident views will inform the final writing-up phase of the work, alerting the student to both policy and research concerns.

References

Deas, I. (2014) 'The search for territorial fixes in sub-national governance: city-regions and the disputed emergence of post-political consensus in Manchester, England', *Urban Studies*, **51**(11), 2285-2314.

Deas, I. and Doyle, J. (2013) 'Building community capacity under 'austerity urbanism': stimulating, supporting and maintaining resident engagement in neighbourhood regeneration in Manchester', *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal*, **6**(4), 365-380.

Lawless, P. and Beatty, C. (2013) 'Exploring change in local regeneration areas: evidence from the New Deal for Communities programme in England', *Urban Studies*, **50**(5), 942-958.

Research training

The extent of training required will be gauged at the outset of the studentship as part of the skills audit process which all research students in the Planning and Environmental Management are required to undertake, in collaboration with their supervisors.

Alongside training provided by the University, there will be an induction phase, within the first three months of the studentship, during which the student will be apprised of Trafford Housing Trust procedures. The induction programme will include consideration related to ethical issues, covering sponsor-researcher roles and relationships and confidentiality in respect of researcher and sponsor data. Following this initial period of familiarisation, it is expected that the student will maintain regular contact with Trafford Housing Trust, through the supervision process and via periodic study at THT's head office.

Further information

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